



Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy to the Homelessness Scrutiny Working Group

12th June 2018

Homelessness Service Briefing

Purpose:	To provide a service briefing as requested by the Homelessness Scrutiny Working Group
Content:	An overview of the Council's Homelessness service.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and make their views known to the Cabinet Member via a Conveners Letter.
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy.
Lead Officer	Jane Harries, Landlord Services Manager
Report Author	Steve Porter, Operations Manager for Community Housing

1. General Description

- 1.1 The Council's Homelessness Service is based at Housing Options on High Street. The role of the service is to ensure that we meet our statutory duties to any household that is homeless or threatened with homelessness, with particular regard to the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.
- 1.2 The Council also work in partnership with Barnardo's to provide homeless services to young people. The Bays+ Service, based at Infonation, provide a specialist service to those who are 16-20 years old.
- 1.3 The Housing Options service deals with over 2,500 homeless presentations per year. Wherever possible the primary aim is to prevent homelessness. Where this is not possible we will look to alleviate homelessness by sourcing more suitable accommodation.
- 1.4 The service deals with a very wide range of service users and there are many reasons why households present as homeless, but the main causes of homelessness include; relationship breakdown, leaving private rented accommodation, domestic violence and those leaving institutions such as prisons, care etc

1.5 Housing Options have generic homeless Caseworkers, but also have specialised Caseworkers who provide assistance to ex-offenders, refugees and we also have a dedicated money advisor who would assist those who may be losing their home through financial difficulties.

1.6 In order to provide the appropriate advice assistance the service has to work closely with other Council services, Agencies and the Voluntary Sector. This would include, Social Services / Supporting People, Health, Police, Shelter, Crisis, The Wallich, Caerlas, Housing Associations and many others.

1.7 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has seen a large shift in the way which homeless services are delivered across Wales and over the last 12 months the Welsh Government has set out its priorities; these include, rough sleeping, youth homelessness, improving use of the private rented sector and mental health.

2. Why We Do This

2.1 As stated, the Council have statutory obligations placed on them to ensure that the appropriate homelessness services are provided, primarily through the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The Council also has to comply with other statutory requirements such as the Social Services and Well Being Act 2014, the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016.

2.2 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a responsibility on all Local Authorities to produce a homelessness strategy in 2018 which will set out how the Council plans to tackle homelessness in its area over a 4 year period. The homelessness service will ensure that the Welsh Government priorities as listed in 1.7 will be reflected within the aims and objectives of the strategy.

2.3 Preventing homelessness is a fundamental function of the Council and this is reflected within the corporate priorities, particularly around tackling poverty and safeguarding people from harm. It is essential that the Council provides a high quality homeless service so that we are able to protect the most vulnerable people in the City. Including providing suitable emergency accommodation, ensuring the right level of support, and provision of supported housing and permanent accommodation. The service priorities are reflected in the objectives of the Local Well Being Plan eg people live in safe, good quality homes.

2.4 The strategic commissioning priorities for Supporting People 2017-18 are strongly linked to homelessness issues and are:

- Prevention of homelessness from within the private rented sector
- Prevention homelessness of victims of domestic abuse
- Preventing homelessness of families with children

- Eliminating the use of bed and breakfast as temporary accommodation
- Provision of support for complex and multiple support needs
- Prison leavers
- Develop further the early intervention and prevention services

2.5 The consequences of not preventing homelessness can have a devastating effect on individuals, families and the community as a whole. In recent years, for example, Wales has seen a rise in rough sleeping and it is vital that the service ensures that rough sleeping is kept to a minimum and services are tailored to ensure that the needs of rough sleepers are met.

3. **Management and Support**

3.1 The Homelessness service sits within the Housing & Public Protection service area under the Directorate of Place. Interim Head of Housing is Mark Wade. Housing Options have 12 Caseworkers and a Casework Manager who are responsible for meeting our statutory duties. In addition, the service is closely linked with Supporting People services such as the Tenancy Support Unit.

4. **Stakeholders**

4.1 The stakeholders in respect of homelessness are vast but below is a list of the main stakeholders that we would work with on a regular basis;

- Service users i.e any person or household who is homeless or threatened with homelessness and makes an application to Swansea;
- Supporting People;
- Social Services;
- Health;
- Bays+ Service;
- Housing Associations;
- Probation/Prisons;
- Police eg through MAPPA & MARAC process;
- Voluntary Sector Organisations eg Crisis / Shelter / Caerlas / The Wallich etc.

4.2 It is vital that we work collaboratively with all our stakeholders particularly when developing the homelessness strategy and identifying gaps in provision. A number of consultation events have been carried out through the Supporting people and Homelessness Forums over the last 12 months, in addition to a number of service user consultation events. The Strategy will be going to full public consultation in August 18 and it is important that we get the views from as many stakeholders as possible.

5. Finance

- 5.1 The Homelessness service is funded by the General Fund. This year additional money was given by the Welsh Government for homelessness prevention via the Revenue Support Grant. Funding of Supporting People services is via the Supporting People Programme Grant (SPPG), although this is currently under review as part of the Full Flexibility Pathfinder.

6. Current Performance and Trends

- 6.1 Swansea have consistently had a high number of homeless presentations, Over the past 5 years these have ranged between 2, 500 – 3000. There is no indication that this will decrease in the next few years and therefore there is continual pressure on the service. Despite these high numbers, Swansea has performed well with preventing homelessness. In 17/18, homelessness was prevented in 68% of cases against a target of 67%.
- 6.2 One of the service priorities is to ensure that the use of B&B is reduced to a minimum, in particular for families in B&B. In 17/18 the average time families spent in B&B was 1.5 days against a target of 6 days.
- 6.3 Rough Sleeping has seen an increase in Wales over the last 3 years. Swansea has seen a steady increase, although the rate of increase has been greater in most other Local Authorities. The table below is a snapshot taken in November over the last 3 years and it gives an idea of the number of rough sleepers recorded in Swansea compared to other LA's;

	2015	2016	2017
Bridgend	6	10	14
Neath	3	6	15
Swansea	19	23	26
Newport	8	17	22
Wrexham	31	61	45
Cardiff	64	85	92
Wales	240	313	345

- 6.4 The Council has for a number of years taking a collaborative approach with a number of partners to ensure that the needs of those sleeping rough are met. The primary partners providing essential outreach services are The Wallich & Caerlas, through the Rough Sleeper Intervention Team, Access Point and emergency bed provision. In addition to these existing support services, for the winter months the

Authority has a Cold Weather Plan. As part of this plan, over the last 8 years the Swansea Night Shelter (SNS) has run between January – March. This has been very successful in supporting rough sleepers during the toughest months. This year 22 rough sleepers were assisted by the SNS in finding more suitable accommodation.

- 6.5 A recent Welsh Audit report published in Jan 18 on *How Local Government Manages Demand* recognised Swansea’s homelessness services for its collaborative approach taken with Supporting People in preventing homelessness. Whilst Swansea Council has adapted well to meet the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and homelessness prevention rates are high, the Council has taken note of the Wales Audit Office’s recent report into Homelessness, which identified that whilst local authorities are changing how they provide services [to meet the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014] and are generally effective at providing advice, not all homeless people and potentially homeless people get the help they need. There are further opportunities to improve prevention and reduce homelessness demand through the provision of effective information and advice. Therefore the Council will aim to ensure that its Strategy takes particular note of the recommendations in relation to this including:
- Making better use of the Council’s website to manage demand
 - Use the WAO checklist to identify options to improve how the Council manages demand for homelessness services
 - Publish service standards that clearly set out the Council’s responsibilities are, how services will be provided to ensure that people know what they are entitled to receive and what they must do themselves.
 - Design services to ensure there is early contact with service users and test the effectiveness of first point of contact to ensure they are fit for purpose.

7. Future Challenges & Opportunities

- 7.1 The emerging homelessness strategy has already identified some key areas of challenges and opportunities and these will be reflected in the Action Plan for delivery over the next 4 years.
- 7.2 Welfare Reform and in particular Universal Credit is a key challenge and we need to ensure that we are able to mitigate against the impact of this over the next 12 months and beyond.
- 7.3 Tackling rough sleeping. This will be a key focus for Swansea Council over the next few years. A huge amount of work is being done in this area and there are excellent links that currently exist with health & the voluntary sector. In addition recent initiatives have included extending our rough sleeper intervention team to provide a 7 day a week, rapid response provision and we are in the process of increasing our emergency bed provision in the City. Next step is to develop a Housing First Project in the City and we are hoping to have this in place during

18/19. This will be a long term project that will aim to get the most vulnerable people and entrenched rough sleepers off the streets and into sustainable accommodation.

- 7.4 Continuing to develop our links with the private rented sector. Since the introduction of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, we have worked closely with the Private Rented Sector Access team based in Housing Options and run by the Wallich. It is vital that we continue to ensure a high quality supply of private rented sector accommodation in order to meet our statutory duties and prevent homelessness.
- 7.5 Working with health and in particular mental health to ensure that we can deal appropriately with the most complex and challenging cases.
- 7.6 Potential changes to legislation with the abolition of priority need and intentionality This could have a major impact on temporary accommodation and provision of supported housing.

8. Risks

- 8.1 Having a reasonable supply of affordable housing is crucial in meeting our statutory requirements. There is a potential risk if the Authority fails to deliver enough affordable housing to meet the needs of homeless households and those in housing need.
- 8.2 Welfare reform/Universal credit may have a detrimental impact on homelessness through an increase in the number of those in rent arrears and potentially seeing a reduction in affordable accommodation.
- 8.3 Whilst not identified as a corporate risk, funding levels are a potential risk to the service. Whilst there has been additional money for homelessness prevention from the Welsh Government this year, if funding levels are reduced for homelessness and/or the Supporting People Programme then this could have a detrimental impact on the levels of homelessness.

9. Assessment

- 9.1 The service continues to provide a robust approach to the prevention of homelessness, and by taking a collaborative and joint multi-agency approach we have been able to successfully tackle homelessness within the City. Close working links with Supporting People and the Voluntary Sector will continue to play an important role in the challenges that lay ahead.
- 9.2 The Council's Homelessness Strategy (2018–2022) will play a fundamental role in ensuring that we are able to provide the appropriate advice, assistance and support to any household who may be threatened with homelessness. The strategy will also ensure that gaps in provision are met and fully reflect the Welsh Government and corporate priorities.

- 9.3 As outlined in the report, rough sleeping and support to those with the most complex needs will be a key focus for the service going forward. A number of innovative approaches have been progressed which have kept rough sleeping to a minimum. Further work in this area is necessary and the Council will be developing a Housing First project during 18/19 which will aim to provide housing and support for the most entrenched rough sleepers and those with the most complex needs.
- 9.4 Preventing homelessness will continue to be the main focus of the service, which will inevitably reduce the numbers of people reaching crisis situations. Such prevention work will include, early intervention, mediation, and ensuring that support is flexible and responsive.
- 9.5 Whilst the Strategy will form the basis of our work going forward, we also need to take account of any changes in legislation and/or external factors which may impact on homelessness in the future. Therefore we need to be flexible in our approach and ensure that the Strategy is kept under continual review.

10. Legal Implications

- 10.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report other than those detailed above. , in particular, the Council's Homelessness Strategy must be completed by the end of 2018, in line with section 50 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

11. Financial Implications

- 11.1 This report is for information only and there are no financial implications associated with this report.

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